

COALITION OF MILITARY MEDICAL CENTER NEIGHBORS

May 1, 2009

Governor Martin O'Malley
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401-1925

RE: Leadership for BRAC Expansion of the new Walter Reed at Bethesda

Dear Governor O'Malley:

The Coalition of Military Medical Center Neighbors (CMMCN) calls upon you to develop and fund a comprehensive and long-term approach to meeting the needs of the Walter Reed Military Medical Center, slated to open in 2011 on the campus of the National Naval Medical Center. The Coalition is a community organization that represents approximately 13,000 people who live, work, attend school, and do business around the Medical Center.

We are concerned that the planning process up to now has been piecemeal, underfunded, and will fail to produce improvements necessary to ensure the success of the communities, businesses and life-enhancing institutions in and around the Medical Center area in 2011 and beyond.

In just 18 months, the new Walter Reed will open its doors to an additional 4,000 people a day - totaling over 1,000,000 visits a year. According to Maryland and Montgomery County standards, the transportation infrastructure is inadequate for the current traffic, let alone additional traffic resulting from the merger of Bethesda Naval and Walter Reed mandated in 2005 through the work of the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Commission.

The State Highway Administration was tasked with examining four key intersections around the base for potential improvements. By their estimates, it will take over \$200 million to complete these short-term fixes. The approximately \$30 million in the Capital Improvements Projects budget at this time for these intersections clearly will not cover all the work proposed. Congressman Chris Van Hollen (MD 8) and Team Maryland have secured some money for the

area, including funding a study of the 355 corridor, but much more is needed if any coordinated effort can result in meaningful improvements.

Many members of the Coalition also serve on the Montgomery County BRAC Implementation Committee. Acting in that capacity, we have reviewed the intersection improvements proposed by the State Highway Administration (SHA) and can only describe them as inadequate and piecemeal. Even the SHA acknowledges these improvements do little more than sustain the current level of failure at the four intersections. Specific comments about each of the four intersections are attached.

The bottom line is that re-engineering intersections in order to increase vehicular capacity will provide little relief to our community, or the employees, military personnel, veterans and their families who need access to the Medical Center. We need an urgent response and coordinated solutions to make this work in a timely manner. The Coalition has long advocated for solutions that reduce the number of Single Occupancy Vehicles on the roadways around the Medical Center. Suggestions to promote multi-modal transportation include better pedestrian and bike access, more drop-off/pick-up sites along the perimeter, improved access to reliable public transportation and direct access to the base via I-495. Intersection improvements however they are undertaken should be durable solutions that promote livable and sustainable communities.

These relatively small steps done the right way are more cost effective for both short and long term benefits for the new Walter Reed and the surrounding area. The State of Maryland must lead the way in designing and funding multi-modal transportation and transit improvements that will be a model of coordinated and sustainable development. Only this approach will improve the quality of life for all affected constituencies. The infrastructure improvements we have seen to date fall far short of this goal.

Thank you for your attention to this critical and time-sensitive issue.

Sincerely,

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About CMMCN

The Coalition of Military Medical Center Neighbors is a group of communities and institutions in the nearby vicinity of the Medical Center Metro. Representing approximately 13,000 individuals who work, live, study and do business in and around Bethesda, the Coalition strives to make the expansion of the new Walter Reed successful by promoting the long-term vitality of the area.

Members include community associations of Bethesda Crest, Bethesda Parkview, Chevy Chase View, East Bethesda, Glenbrook Village, Maplewood, Locust Hill Estates, Parkwood, Town of Oakmont, and the Village of North Chevy Chase as well as the Stone Ridge School and the Howard Hughes Medical Institute.

cc:

The Honorable Anthony Brown, Lieutenant Governor of Maryland
John D. Porcari, Secretary, Maryland Department of Transportation
Christian S. Johansson, Secretary, Maryland Department of Business and Economic Development
The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
The Honorable Benjamin J. Cardin
The Honorable Christopher Van Hollen
The Honorable Richard Madaleno
The Honorable Alfred Carr
The Honorable Ana Sol Gutierrez
The Honorable Jeffrey Waldstreicher
The Honorable Brian Frosh
The Honorable Bill Bronrott
The Honorable Susan Lee
The Honorable Bill Frick
The Honorable Isiah Leggett
The Honorable Arthur Holmes
The Honorable Phil Andrews
The Honorable Roger Berliner
The Honorable Michael Knapp
The Honorable Nancy Floreen
The Honorable Valerie Ervin
The Honorable George Leventhal
The Honorable Marc Elrich
The Honorable Royce Hanson

Wisconsin Ave (Route 355) and East & West Cedar Lanes

Most beneficial improvements

- Widening West Cedar Lane on the South Side which will improve traffic flow at the intersection
- Widening Route 355 on the West Side, South of West Cedar Lane will permit NIH traffic to smoothly exit into Wilson Drive. However, extension of the new lane to Center Drive would further aid in this effort as well as get buses which enter NIH at Center Drive out of the through traffic lanes.
- Extension of left turn bay for Southbound 355 traffic into Northwood Drive will prevent traffic waiting to turn left from blocking through traffic.

Proposed improvements of questionable value

- Widening of Route 355 on the East side which will only cause congestion further North as traffic from the newly created lane has to merge to the left
- Creation of a left turn bay, Northbound, for trucks entering the NIH Commercial Vehicle Inspection Station. Trucks will limit the view of drivers turning left into Northwood drive that will be especially dangerous during hours when the proposed traffic signal is not working. A better solution may be for the Northbound CVIS traffic to turn left onto Wilson Drive and enter the inspection station at that point.
- Operation of a traffic signal at Northwood Drive during the PM rush will require Northbound 355 traffic to clear the Cedar Lane intersection in order for traffic exiting Northwood Drive to have a place to go. This action will move the stopping point for through northbound traffic further to the South and simultaneously move the backup that occurs at this intersection further to the South.
- Widening of Route 355 on the West Side to the North of West Cedar Lane. This extra lane is not needed. Most traffic turns right onto West Cedar Lane during the PM rush when 355 Southbound has plenty of capacity. During the AM rush most traffic flows South and little of it turns onto West Cedar Lane.

Jones Bridge Road and Connecticut Avenue (Route 185)

Most beneficial improvements

The right turn lane on southbound Connecticut Avenue between the Beltway and Jones Bridge Road is the most beneficial element of the MSHA's BRAC-related improvements to the Connecticut Avenue/Jones Bridge Road intersection.

- Many motorists who exit the Inner Loop of the Beltway turn right onto westbound Jones Bridge Road. They must merge into the flow of southbound Connecticut Avenue through traffic in a short merge lane. A dedicated right turn lane on southbound Connecticut Avenue would allow these motorists to safely and conveniently exit the Inner Loop, stay in their own receiving lane, and avoid merging with southbound Connecticut Avenue through traffic.

Proposed Improvements of Questionable Value

Adding two lanes to eastbound Jones Bridge Road will require additional right-of-way (ROW) on both sides of Connecticut Avenue while providing little benefit and creating additional operational issues, for both vehicular and other traffic.

- Two additional lanes on Jones Bridge Road – one for the third left turn lane and one for the dedicated right turn lane – will necessitate an additional lane on the far (east) side of Connecticut Avenue in order for the eastbound through lanes to be properly aligned.
- Triple left turn lanes may present traffic operational problems. Many motorists who make the eastbound-to-northbound left turn are destined for the Beltway. The Inner Loop on-ramp is located about 1,400 feet north of Jones Bridge Road. A disproportionate number of left turns will be in the rightmost of the three left turn lanes. The middle and leftmost lanes may be under-utilized. Thus, the triple lefts may operate inefficiently.
- A dedicated eastbound right turn lane is not warranted or needed. The MSHA's capacity analysis shows no need for this lane. Only 68 AM peak hour trips, and 104 PM peak hour trips, are forecasted to make this movement in 2011. It is not a critical movement.
- The MSHA plan makes pedestrian and bicycle crossing more challenging. Pedestrians would have to cross eight lanes of traffic on the west and south legs of the intersection, and six lanes on the east leg.

Other items to consider

- Consider prohibiting left turns out of Kensington Parkway. This would simplify the signal operation by eliminating one of signal phases, thereby increasing intersection capacity.

Wisconsin Ave (Route 355) and Jones Bridge Road/Center Lane

Most beneficial improvements

- Implementing improvements that are part of a comprehensive plan and would follow the State and County concepts with vehicles, bicycles and pedestrians in an urban setting.

Proposed improvements of questionable value

- West bound Jones Bridge needs two lanes to enter NIH. 355 and JBR is already a staging area for the security gate. Going down to one lane will make the backups worse in the morning rush.
- East bound Jones Bridge exiting NIH, there is not enough traffic making a right hand turn to justify adding that lane.
- The addition of a shared through and right hand turn lane on south bound 355 seems unnecessary at this point on the perimeter given that the lane does not extend for the length of 355 between Jones Bridge Road and Cedar Lane
- Northbound 355, while the extension of the right hand turn lane may help move right turn traffic through the intersection, but it would only exacerbate the backups currently experienced on Jones Bridge Road, it will not impact northbound through traffic and the cost does not warrant the improvement.
- South bound 355, the addition of a left hand turn lane onto Jones Bridge Road would reduce the back ups on south bound 355 but would again exacerbate the backups on Jones Bridge Road.

Other factors to consider:

- There is a new NIH Visitor Center entrance and egress on southbound Route 355.
- The interrelated nature of the intersections.
- What happens to Route 355 between Jones Bridge Road and Cedar Lane?
- The crux of the problem is vehicles exiting NIH at Center Drive and Wilson Lane and NNMC at North Wood Drive combined with bus and pedestrian traffic crossing at South Wood Drive.
- Many of the proposed improvements impede bike and pedestrian pathways.
- While 355 and Jones Bridge Road continues to be a failing intersection, these proposed improvements do not take into consideration the larger vision and therefore cannot be supported without a comprehensive plan.

Old Georgetown Road (Route 187) and Oakmont Ave./West Cedar Lane

Most Beneficial Improvements

- **Creating three lanes for westbound traffic on W. Cedar Lane at Old Georgetown intersection** (Agree with this proposal with an important modification).
The center lane should be a left turn and thru lane (not just a thru lane). Frequent illegal left turns from the right lane on Cedar Lane at this intersection demonstrates the need for two left-turning lanes onto southbound Rt. 187. This improvement will allow better through-traffic at this intersection; however, **this change will only realize its full potential for better traffic flow if coupled with a sequential green light for Oakmont Ave and West Cedar Lane traffic rather than a concurrent green light.**
- **Committed right turn lane from NIH exit up to W. Cedar Lane (south side of intersection) on northbound Rt. 187** (Agree with this proposed change as shown in SHA Option 1, which does not impact the fire station driveway.)
This improvement will relieve northbound traffic on Rt. 187 during the evening rush hour between Suburban Hospital & NIH and the 495 Beltway.
- **Closure of NIH parking lot entrance on Oakmont Ave**
Widening the entrance/exit driveway to NIH Building 82 off of Rt. 187 will keep traffic from piling up at the intersection at Oakmont Ave. and Rt. 187 during the morning rush hour.
- **Widening of Rt. 187 northbound on the north-east side of the intersection** (Agree with this proposed change as shown in SHA Option 2.)
This approach will have relatively less impact on the land owner and will not further compromise the minimal front yard of the Walter Johnson House which has historic designation. This additional space at the corner will allow a softer turn which will facilitate turns for buses and right turns on red by other vehicles turning onto northbound Rt. 187.

Opposed “Proposed Improvements” that would be ineffective, hazardous and costly

- **Widening Oakmont Ave. to three lanes to create a committed left turn lane and a thru/right turn lane.**

This change will not relieve the traffic problem for BRAC and would create a larger safety issue on a school/neighborhood street. Oakmont Ave is a residential street and serves drivers who live in the neighborhood or who have children attending one of the three schools in the neighborhood: the B-CC YMCA Arylawn Day Care Center, Wyngate Elementary School and North Bethesda Middle School. Patients traveling to Walter Reed Medical Center at Naval Medical do not use Oakmont Ave. Most vehicles exiting Oakmont Ave. go straight or turn left.

Currently vehicles turning left sit in the intersection to yield to the large volume of traffic coming across from W. Cedar Lane. This will not change with the addition of a left turn lane. Vehicles going straight across the intersection will force vehicles turning left from W. Cedar Lane onto southbound Rt. 187 to either wait or almost force an accident (as happens often now). At best it would speed up turning traffic putting children/pedestrians in the neighborhood at further risk.

In addition, those turning right will still have to wait for those going straight to navigate the intersection. This plan will take away natural safety zones and property, create a more dangerous street for children to cross, and the vehicles will still have to wait and engage in an aggressive battle with oncoming traffic from Cedar Lane.

A Cost Effective Alternative Solution

- A sequential green light for Oakmont Ave and West Cedar Lane traffic will facilitate traffic flow through this intersection and won't require purchasing private property.

Coalition of Military Medical Center Neighbors

The new Walter Reed Military Medical Center at Bethesda is poised to become the **crown jewel of military medicine**.

Civic, business and non-profit organizations surrounding this vital world-class institution are honored to be engaged in the process of ensuring its **success**.

The necessary and appropriate improvements to the transportation and transit infrastructure must be designed and funded.

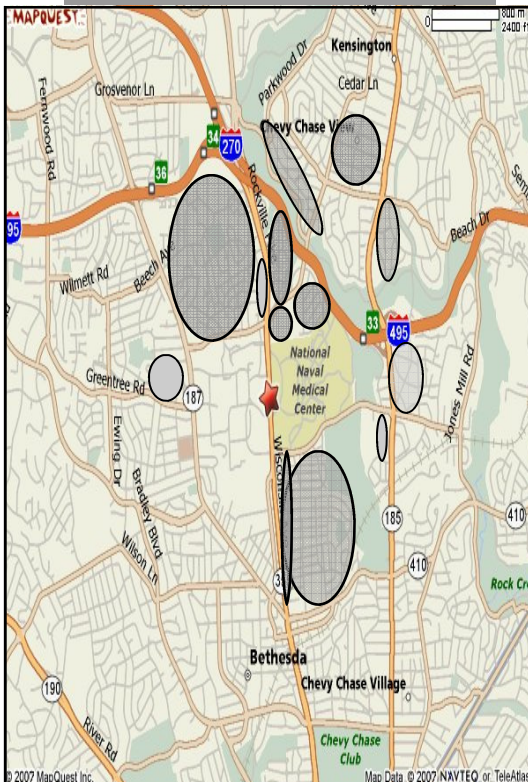
The Coalition provides critical local perspective to county, state and federal officials engaged in this process.

The Coalition is committed to:

- Ensuring military veterans and staff can easily access the new Walter Reed;
- Maintaining the quality of life for local communities;
- Preserving the area's economic vitality and thriving business district.

A comprehensive list of objectives can be viewed on the following page.

CMMCN represents more than 13,000 people who live, work, do business and attend school in the vicinity of the new Walter Reed National Military Medical Center (WRNMMC), Bethesda, Md.



Bethesda Crest HOA, Bethesda Parkview, Chevy Chase View, East Bethesda, Glenbrook Village, Howard Hughes Medical Institute, Maplewood, Locust Hill Estates, Parkwood, Stone Ridge School, Town of Oakmont, Village of Chevy Chase and growing

Beginning September 15, 2011, more than 1 million people will access the new Walter Reed annually.

The Coalition seeks to promote and support creative solutions to reduce the number of Single Occupancy Vehicles (SOV) on area roads and relieve gridlock in the following ways:

- Improve **pedestrian and bike** access to and around the base including a tunnel or bridge that provides safe, unimpeded pedestrian access across Route 355.
- Increase **public transportation** access and reliability including the construction of a new Metro entrance at the Medical Center stop on the eastern side of Wisconsin Avenue.
- Provide dedicated **drop-off/pick-up areas** at the base perimeter on Route 355 and Jones Bridge Road for better access to and from the base for cars, car pools, van pools and shuttle services.
- Support the Navy in its efforts to **implement programs** to reduce the number of SOVs accessing the base and improve the flow of traffic inside the perimeter.
- Plan, build and maintain a **comprehensive transportation infrastructure** including intersection improvements to support anticipated growth and development along the Route 355 corridor.
- Study the feasibility of **direct access** to the Base from I-495.

The Coalition strives to ensure that an informed and engaged community provides critical input to the development process to promote short-term solutions and an understanding of the long-term vision for the area's growth.

It seeks judicious uses of resources for the mitigation of traffic and smarter development planning to preserve this area as a safe, vibrant and livable community.

CMMCN includes the community associations of Bethesda Crest, Bethesda Parkview, Chevy Chase View, East Bethesda, Glenbrook Village, Maplewood, Locust Hill Estates, Parkwood, Town of Oakmont and the Village of Chevy Chase as well as the Stone Ridge School and the Howard Hughes Medical Institute.

For more information and to find out how your civic association can get involved, contact Ilaya Hopkins at 301-907-9878 or join www.groups.yahoo.com/group/CMMCN.